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ABSTRACT

Most language and international studies high schools (LISHS) are established as public magnet schools and stress voluntary enrollment. Generally, the academic curriculum emphasizes foreign languages, social sciences, and communications for participation in an international environment. Students are expected to graduate with functional competence in at least one foreign language. The program also includes a traditional secondary school curriculum, field trips, independent study, and cultural exchange programs. The programs can be designed to be housed in a separate building or, more commonly, as a school within a school. Financing and other support through local resources is preferred to dependence on federal grant support. Some issues of LISHS remain to be addressed, including staffing problems and the perception or threat of elitism. Some schools allow students to choose between preparing for a career-focused internship with an international company abroad or in urban America, and preparing for the International Baccalaureate Diploma during the last two years of school. The creation and maintenance of more LISHS will depend on the intelligence, commitment, and interest of educators, parents, and local leaders. (MSE)

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ERIC DIGEST

ERIC Clearinghouse on
Languages and Linguistics

FOREIGN LANGUAGE AND INTERNATIONAL STUDIES HIGH SCHOOLS

Prepared by Carol A. Herron
October 1985

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ERIC CLEARINGHOUSE ON LANGUAGES AND LINGUISTICS

ERIC Digest

Foreign Language and International Studies High Schools

Prepared by Carol A. Herron

October 1985

What Is Unique About These Schools?

Although most Language and International Studies High Schools (LISHS) are a part of the public school system, they represent a departure from the tradition of attendance by geographic location. Most have been established as magnet schools, i.e., schools that reflect a central academic or vocational theme and are organized to encourage students to attend school outside their own neighborhood. LISHS usually stress voluntary enrollment, although they may choose to direct their programs to special students, perhaps those with a certain grade point average or those identified as gifted and talented.

Generally, the academic curriculum (of both public and private) emphasizes foreign languages, social sciences, and communications. The purpose of all three curricular areas is to help students develop the competencies necessary for effective participation in an international environment. The development of a functional command of at least one modern foreign language is the single element that distinguishes this kind of school from that of a regular high school or one that stresses social science programs and offers foreign language study as an elective. The absolute centrality of foreign language study cannot be stressed enough. No successes in "international education" will make up for failure in this area.

Students are expected to graduate with a functional competence of a foreign language; the background papers to the 1979 President's Commission stressed that during the LISHS experience, students and teachers are to use the foreign language as the medium of instruction not only in the foreign language classroom but also in the social science oriented courses. In addition to a first foreign language that students study for a minimum of four years, a second foreign language, preferably one of the less commonly taught languages (like Chinese, Arabic, Japanese), is to be studied for at least two years.

In order to satisfy state graduation requirements, students also take courses found in a traditional secondary school curriculum. Whenever possible, teachers in these subject areas agree to stress global concerns. In home economics, for example, students may prepare menus of Japanese foods. In a freshman English course, students may learn how to write Japanese poetry, and in their art class, calligraphy and brush painting will be included.

Field trips, independent study in cooperation with international agencies located in the area, and cultural exchange programs usually round out the curriculum. The focus of these experiences is that students are actively encouraged and given the opportunity to live, work, and play in an environment where they can *use* any achieved second or third language competency.

How Are These Schools Organized?

Foreign language and international studies programs can be designed and implemented on several models. One model involves one building in a single school district. This school draws teachers, resources, and students from the entire district (or, perhaps, the region) and is devoted exclusively to the study of foreign languages and international studies. This model is used by both public and private schools. A second model is a school-within-a-school. Due to space limitations or budgetary restraints, a certain portion of a school can be designated as a magnet school drawing students from the entire school district.

At the present time, the most prevalent magnet school model is the school-within-a-school concept. An example of such organization is the North Fulton Center for International Studies in Atlanta, GA. The Center is located within the walls of North Fulton High School (NFHS). Of the 500 students enrolled at NFHS, approximately 200 are official participants in the Center. A unique feature of this magnet school is its racial mixture and cultural diversity: 52% of the students are black; 41% are white; and 7% are foreign-born. Applicants are admitted to the Center in grades 9 and 10. Criteria for admission are a reading score at grade level or above and a minimum grade-point average of 2.5 in social sciences, language arts, and any foreign language(s) studies. To remain enrolled in the Center, students must maintain an overall 2.5 grade-point average.

How Are These Schools Funded?

Dependence on federal support in the form of grants is not encouraged. The National Seminar on the Implementation of International Schools, sponsored by Exxon Education Foundation in 1980, strongly advocates that such public schools be developed through local resources, with federal funds playing at most a temporary supporting role in the beginning.

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The essential feature that will permit such a school to run at a relatively low operating cost is that the community, as distinct from only the school district, contributes its time and service. The assumption is that local industries and institutions will provide their services and expertise at a very low cost, if not free of charge, to an international high school. Indeed, the most effective schools are built on local ethnic concern and private corporate support.

What Unusual Problems Exist?

While such schools do afford choices to students who have different learning styles and interests, certain issues still need to be addressed. Staffing is a particularly crucial problem in international high schools as it is difficult to find faculty within a school district fluent enough in a second or third language to teach their particular subject matter (world history) in the target language. In some cases, present faculty have to be retrained and/or native speakers from the community sought.

The issue of elitism is often raised as magnet schools are sometimes equated with selective schools. Yet, "selective" schools have contributed to public education (e.g., the Bronx High School for Science, alma mater to three Nobel Prize winners) and private education as well. Nevertheless, to avoid this issue, some international high schools have adopted a two-pronged approach: Students choose between preparing for and participating in a career-focused internship with an international company abroad or in an urban American center during the junior and senior years and preparing for the International Baccalaureat Examination during the last two years of school.

The International Baccalaureat Program (IBP) was developed and is sponsored by a Swiss Foundation with headquarters in Geneva. The IBP offers standards of achievement in subjects traditionally studied in the last years of high school, leading to a diploma that is recognized by a large number of universities and colleges in 35 countries for purposes of admission, course credit/advance standing, advanced placement without credit, or a combination of these.

How Many Such Schools Are There?

As early as 1979, the President's Commission on Foreign Language and International Studies made a series of recommendations, one of which called for federal funding to develop 20 international high schools. These schools were to serve as national models and to offer intensive foreign language and cultural studies in addition to all regularly required courses. The primary purpose of such schools was to increase foreign language competence and to promote an international perspective in education. Today, of the more than 1,100 elementary and secondary magnet schools in more than 130 school districts, the National Council on Foreign Languages and International Studies reports that 30 schools are specifically designated as Foreign Language and International Studies High Schools. In addition, there are several private schools with the same kinds of goals. A list of these can be obtained from the Global Perspectives Information Exchange Network. (See "Resources" list.)

The creation and maintenance of more language and international studies schools will not come from national trends, college pressure, or other impersonal forces, but from the intelligence, commitment, and interest of educators, parents, and local leaders.

The success of the concept does not depend on federal capitation grants or incentive funds. It builds on local ethnic concerns, world problems, and private corporate support within a community.

Resources

Global Perspectives in Education, Inc., 218 East 18th St., New York, NY 10003.

International Baccalaureate of North America, 680 5th Ave., New York, NY 10019.

National Council on Foreign Languages and International Studies, 605 3rd Ave., 17th Floor, New York, NY 10158.

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